

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 100669 TOSEC 110137

NODIS

CHEROKEE

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE FROM AMMAN DTD 26 APR 1976 QUOTE

S E C R E T AMMAN 2222

NODIS//CHEROKEE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, JO, US, SY

SUBJECT: TALK WITH RIFAI -- POSSIBLE MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT FORD AND ASAD

REF: AMMAN 2199

SUMMARY. RIFAI RAISED WITH ASAD ON FRIDAY, APRIL 23, POSSIBILITY OF MEETING BETWEEN TWO PRESIDENTS. ASAD IS SINCERELY INTERESTED ACCORDING TO RIFAI. RIFAI SAID ASAD DID NOT DISMISS THE POSSIBILITY THAT BOTH PRESIDENTS COULD BE IN EUROPE AT THE SAME TIME, POSSIBLY WHEN ASAD RESCHEDULES HIS TRIP TO FRANCE. RIFAI SAID ASAD SHOWED DEEP INTEREST IN US ELECTORAL PROCESS, CONVENTIONS AND THEIR TIMING, AND UP-COMING PRIMARIES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE. END SUMMARY

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1. IN THE COURSE OF A LONG CONVERSATION APRIL 26,

RIFAI DEBRIEFED ME ON HIS MEETING WITH ASAD WHICH COVERED FIVE HOURS ON THE AFTERNOON OF FRIDAY, APRIL 23. RIFAI SAID THAT ASAD HAD SHOWN A DEEP INTEREST IN KING'S CONVERSATIONS WITH YOURSELF AND THE PRESIDENT AT THE WHITE HOUSE. RIFAI HAD GIVEN ASAD AN EXTENSIVE DEBRIEF AND TOUCHED PARTICULARLY ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE TWO PRESIDENTS IN THE FUTURE.

2. RIFAI SAID HE TOLD ASAD THAT THE US HAD ASKED ABOUT, AND HE AND THE KING HAD INDICATED TO PRESIDENT FORD, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR ASAD TO ATTEND A UN SESSION THIS AUTUMN. RIFAI SAID THAT IT HAD ALSO BEEN SUGGESTED AT THE WHITE HOUSE THAT A MEETING IN EUROPE MIGHT BE POSSIBLE. RIFAI THEN ASKED ASAD WHEN HE WAS GOING TO FRANCE. ASAD SAID IT HAD HAD TO BE POSTPONED AGAIN BECAUSE OF LEBANON AND ITS UNCERTAINTIES. RIFAI SUGGESTED THAT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR ASAD TO SEE THE PRESIDENT IN EUROPE IF THEY WERE BOTH GOING TO BE THERE AT THE SAME TIME. RIFAI SAID ASAD NODDED HIS HEAD IN AGREEMENT. IN ADDITION, RIFAI SAID HE DISCUSSED THE THIRD POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE OF THE PRESIDENT SEEING PRESIDENT ASAD IN DAMASCUS. RIFAI MADE CLEAR TO ASAD THAT IF THIS WERE THE CASE THE PRESIDENT WOULD ALSO HAVE TO VISIT OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST. RIFAI NOTED THAT HE THEN BRIEFED ASAD ON HIS UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE US ELECTORAL PROCESS IS OPERATING AND HIS VIEW OF THE RESTRAINTS WHICH THIS MIGHT PLACE ON THE PRESIDENT'S DECISIONS TO TRAVEL TO THE MIDDLE EAST.

3. RIFAI SAID ASAD ASKED A LARGE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS LATTER ALTERNATIVE. RIFAI SAID THAT HE ALSO WAS ABLE TO INDICATE, AS YOU HAD SAID AT THE WHITE HOUSE MEETING, THAT THE TWO PRESIDENTS WOULD GET ALONG WELL TOGETHER.

4. RIFAI MADE CLEAR THAT HE WAS NOT TRYING TO SEEK TO FORMULATE ANY SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS, ONLY TO FILL IN ASAD ON THE MEETING AND ENCOURAGE HIM IN THE DIRECTION WHICH HE THOUGHT, AND HE GATHERED FROM THE MEETING THAT WE AGREED, THAT WOULD BE HELPFUL IN FURTHERING
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US CREDIBILITY AND ACCEPTANCE WITH ASAD AND SYRIA. RIFAI'S CONCLUSION IS THAT ASAD SEEMS VERY INTRIGUED WITH THE IDEA OF A MEETING. HE ALSO IMPLIED (BUT DID NOT SAY) THAT ASAD MIGHT BE PREPARED TO SCHEDULE HIS TRAVELS TO FRANCE IN A WAY WHICH WOULD FACILITATE MEETING IF THERE WERE A DEFINITE INTEREST EXPRESSED IN THIS ON THE US SIDE. RIFAI DID NOT ASK ME TO SOLICIT ANY MORE INFORMATION OR OTHERWISE TO ENHANCE HIS ROLE AS A GO-

BETWEEN. I TOLD HIM I WOULD REPORT OUR CONVERSATION IN
DETAIL TO YOU.

5. SUGGEST THIS TELEGRAM BE REPEATED TO DAMASCUS.
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